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April 22, 2008

SACRED HEART HOSPITAL AND HEALTHCARE SYSTEM SETTLE MEDICARE BILLING DISPUTE

PHILADELPHIA - United States Attorney Pat Meehan today announced a settlement with Sacred Heart Hospital of Allentown and Sacred Heart Healthcare System for improper anesthesia charges that were submitted to Medicare and paid by the federal government from the period of November 11, 1998 to May 13, 2004.

Charles Farley and James Prudente are Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists at Sacred Heart Hospital of Allentown. Their services were billed to Medicare during the period at issue for the CRNA anesthesia component for 287 open heart, bypass surgeries for patients at Sacred Heart Hospital. Anesthesia providers may only bill for the periods of time that they are physically present with the patient providing anesthesia services. Prudente and Farley left the operating room for periods of time while their patients were on bypass during open heart surgeries without arranging for another CRNA or an anesthesiologist to be present in the operating room. No anesthesiologists or CRNAs were continuously in the operating room of the open-heart surgery patients during the time that Prudente and Farley were out of the operating rooms. Prudente and Farley had their services billed to Medicare for all bypass open heart surgeries that they were involved in as if they were constantly present in the operating room with their patients. Sacred Heart Hospital and Sacred Heart Healthcare System agreed to pay to the United States \$ 100,000.00 to settle this matter.

The case was assigned to AUSA Susan Dein Bricklin. The case was investigated by Special Agent Tim Handley of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Inspector General and by Denis J. Cooke, Auditor, United States Attorney's Office.

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